

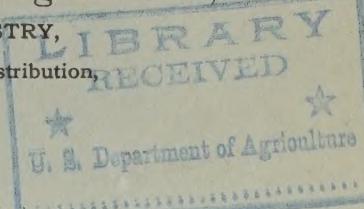
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P694

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BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY,
Seed and Plant Introduction and Distribution
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COWPEAS (*Vigna unguiculata*)

The cowpea is a native of oriental regions, but it has been grown in this country for about two hundred years and is quite generally known in the southern United States. The crop is a valuable one in various ways. It is one of the strongest growing annual legumes, and when well inoculated the number and size of tubercles on its roots are remarkable. This enables it to draw heavily on the nitrogen supply of the air, and it is therefore a good soil renovator. It can be cut for hay and if properly cured is excellent forage. It is valuable for pasture and can be used for soiling. It is not suitable for ensilage unless mixed with corn. The grain is a rich feed, but when harvested by hand, as heretofore, it is too expensive for this purpose. It is an excellent green-manure plant, but growing it for this purpose alone is not profitable except in cases of extreme soil impoverishment.

Seeding.—Cowpeas may be sown either in rows or broadcasted. In rows, 30 inches apart is a very satisfactory distance, and the plants should be 4 or 5 inches apart in the row. Sown broadcast, the better policy is to put them in with a grain drill, using about a bushel of seed per acre. If sown by hand, it will require a little more than this. When in rows a bushel should plant 4 to 6 acres. Seeding should be done when the soil is warm and not too wet. The seed will then germinate very readily. Cowpeas are often sown on stubble, but give much better results on well-prepared land.

Varieties.—The cowpea is grown under a great many variety names, but there are only ten or twelve which seem of any real importance. Even the more important ones are found under different names in various sections of the country. The varieties of cowpeas are distinguished most readily by the color and size of the seed, though they differ in size, earliness, etc. The early varieties are smaller in growth. The following is a brief description of the more important varieties:

Unknown, or Wonderful.—A large growing, quite erect pea, having large leaves and a moderate number of pods. It is one of the most vigorous of the cowpeas in most sections. The seed is of medium size and light gray color. It requires a rather long period for maturing, and a crop of seed can not be relied upon north of Tennessee. This is probably the best variety for planting with corn or for green manuring.

Clay.—This variety shows, perhaps, the greatest variation of any of the more common ones, ranging from very early to quite late and from quite erect forms to some of the worst trailers. The seed is usually a little larger than the Unknown cowpea and varies in color from lighter clay to much darker, the usual color being a shade darker than that of the Unknown variety. It is a vigorous grower and yields well. It is suitable for growing either for hay, grain, or green manuring.

Iron.—The Iron differs only in a small measure from the Clay variety, except in one important particular, namely, that it is immune to the attacks of nematodes on its roots, differing also from all other varieties in this respect. The seed is a little smaller than that of the Clay variety, and the plants hardly go to the same extreme in trailing.

Michigan Favorite.—This pea is inclined to be low growing and trails pretty badly; hence it is of little value for forage, but yields grain heavily. It is the largest seeded cowpea, having quite round, very dark, clay-colored seeds. It is probably the earliest maturing cowpea, and therefore especially suitable for northern conditions. In northern Texas it has also proved to be an excellent variety.

Whippoorwill.—This is one of the more common cowpeas. It is a strong grower, quite erect, yields quite heavily, and is a good variety to grow for forage, either as a hay crop or planted in the corn rows. It is also suitable as a crop for seed and is used to some extent for green manuring, being nearly as large a grower as the Unknown variety. The seed is speckled in color, brown and clay mixed, and about average in size.

New Era.—This is the most erect of the commercial cowpeas. It is usually of moderate size, but yields more seed than any other variety. It is one of the earliest peas and can therefore be grown quite far to the north. The seed is rather small in size, speckled the same as Whippoorwill, but much darker in color. Owing to the moderate size of the plant it is not usually grown for hay.

Taylor.—This is probably the lowest growing and most trailing of the commercial cowpeas. It has quite large, speckled seeds, which are much lighter in color than those of the New Era variety and a little lighter than those of the Whippoorwill cowpea, having a light gray effect. It is a vigorous grower and matures in average time. It is grown only in a limited way at present, under several different names.

Red Ripper.—This is a vigorous grower and somewhat resembles the Whippoorwill and Unknown varieties in its habits of growth. It is suitable for green manuring, hay, or for planting in corn rows. It is later in maturing than the Unknown variety, so that seed production is limited to the South. The seed is rather small in size and dark red in color. This variety generally produces a light crop of seed, which is rather a serious drawback.

Blackeye.—This is probably the most commonly grown cowpea, due doubtless to its being used to a considerable extent as a table pea. It makes considerable growth, both in vine and grain, but trails pretty badly. In maturing it ranges from quite early to late. The seed is of average size, nearly white, with a black eye.

Black.—This variety is not extensively grown except locally. It is a medium maturing pea, not a very large grower, and is inclined to be trailing. The seed is of fair size and, as the name indicates, black in color.

Seed.—Nearly all of the cowpea seed on the market is picked by hand, and hence is rather expensive. The price during the last two years has been from \$1.75 to \$2.50 per bushel of 60 pounds. Recent developments, however, in the harvesting of cowpeas by machinery will probably result in greatly reducing the cost. Cowpea seed rapidly deteriorates, and seed more than 2 years old should not be planted.

Suggestions.—Owing to the manner of gathering seed, most localities grow but a single variety of cowpea, and in some cases this is by no means the best. It is desirable, therefore, to test the different varieties side by side, so as to determine the best for each locality. It should be borne in mind that any variety of cowpea, like corn and other annual crops, adapts itself to particular climatic conditions, so that northern seed and southern seed of the same variety give different results. As a rule it is best, if possible, to secure locally grown seed.

